

Political murders galore

Bring culprits to justice as a deterrent

THE killing of Monzurul Imam, Khulna city Awami League chief, comes as a rude shock to the entire nation. And it goes to contradict the optimism expressed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Home Affairs about law and order only three days back. We share the grief of the nation at his dastardly death.

What is particularly agonising about the ghoulisish crime is that it ended the life of a man who had an unflinching faith in democracy and constitutional politics. He was a leading organiser of the Liberation War in the southern region and his political career was never stigmatised by any dubious activities. He enjoyed wide acceptability cutting across party lines. Yet, he fell victim to the assassin's bullet.

The crime was committed when a special police drive was on in the southern districts. The districts, particularly Khulna, witnessed a series of political killings in recent times, but the law enforcers have failed to resolve any of those cases. It is not without reason that people may begin to blame their failure for further worsening of the situation. The criminals have apparently got away with everything they did.

The presence of outlawed extremist groups in the region adds a new dimension to the crime situation and it is for the first time that one such group has claimed the responsibility for the murder. However, the major political parties are still reacting to such crimes in more or less the same way as they did in the past. We believe these incidents are sending danger signals that the parties can ill afford to ignore. But the supporters of the Awami League turned their ire on political rivals. Could that vandalism be justified? The onus of proving themselves not guilty does not appear to rest, at least for the time being, with the Awami League's political rivals since a group has claimed the responsibility for the crime.

Political finger-pointing is not the answer to the problem. One theory on Monzurul Imam's killing has gone to the extent of surmising that it was the act of some group, which the police were chasing, and the crime was used as a diversionary tactic that would push the major political parties further away from each other and slacken the grip of the law.

It should be pretty clear to the political parties that they are treading a slippery ground where the only way to retain balance is to eliminate the menace of political vendetta through collective efforts. The same elements on either side of the divide should unite and resist the hired killers and their godfathers who have turned politics into a highly hazardous proposition.

Mumbai massacre

Indo-Pak relations must not be strained

THE twin blasts on Monday in the heart of India's commercial capital Mumbai, most probably reminded the city-dwellers of the same horror they had experienced almost ten years ago. In 1993, Mumbai had seen a string of blasts that killed at least 300 people. In 2003 the city witnesses two car bomb attacks snuffing out at least 50 souls and injuring more than 250. We condemn such terrorist acts at public places where hundreds of innocents fall prey to the cowardly behaviour of some insane human beings. We have said it before and we are saying it again -- killing innocent people is an outrage against humanity, and therefore, patently reprehensible.

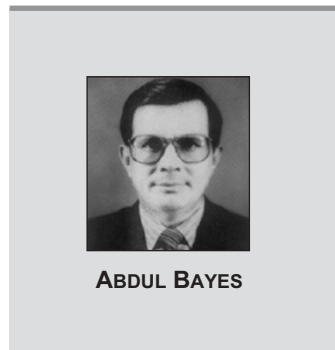
Usually India is quick in pointing its finger to ISI, the Pakistan intelligence agency, for such a dastardly act on Indian soil. Pakistan has been equally prompt in dismissing such an accusation. But this time around, there has been something of a departure. Indian Deputy PM Advani's comments after the blasts and the quick condemnation from the Pakistani government of the incident can be described as carefully calibrated reactions. Without any doubt, the cautious diplomatic tone in the voices of both the governments indicates that neither side is prepared, in any manner, to be blamed for any probable debacle that might occur in the normalisation process that got underway sometime back and is going full steam ahead. We take heart in the fact that both seem to be trying hard not to negate the positive signs that have emerged recently. Let us hope the efforts to build trust would continue and that Indian PM Vajpayee's forthcoming visit to Pakistan would help further strengthen the process.

What we are gravely concerned about is the sheer scale of destruction wrought by terrorist attacks nearer home. In Mumbai, there have been five blasts in the last eight months and there is a pattern to these: bombs exploding in buses, trains, fast food restaurants and shopping malls.

Let the investigations prove conclusive so that the culprits are speedily brought to justice.

We express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims and sympathise with those injured.

Agriculture and baneful bifurcation



ABDUL BAYES

THE 25th conference of the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE) was held in Durban, South Africa from 16-22 August, 2003. More than 800 delegates from around the world gathered to join the gala meet held every three years. This year's theme of the conference, *Reshaping Agriculture's Contributions to Society*, revolved round reexamining the role of agriculture in a fast moving world, particularly pertaining to agriculture. Both old and new issues were on board for discussion. For example, farm size, differential growth and productivity, impact of technology etc. appeared side by side with most recent researches like food safety and food security, bio technology and the poor, market access for agricultural businesses and the role of media in policy making process etc.

Presidential points

Customarily, the President of IAAE is supposed to set the tone of the conference through his maiden speech. The president usually is expected to summarise the events that shaped the sector over the years and provide his opinions in meeting the challenges. In the recently held conference that I am referring to, it was Dr Joachim von Braun, the German born ace economist in the arena of world agriculture and now the head of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), who had to roll the ball first.

He picked up the topic: "Agricultural Economics and Distributional Effects", probably, to remind the researchers that "over the past seven decades, however, the representation of distributional effects at our conferences has been rather uneven and may be more a product of *Zeitgeist* than of the actual nature and scope of the issues." The *raison detre* for raising now the issue that was "out in the cold" could be gleaned from some of the shivering statistics that he drew upon to drive home the point. And allow me to submit some of those statistics and statements (at times paraphrased).

Trifling "trickle down"

It seems that the so-called "trickle down" effects -- a la Kuznet's curve -- could hardly have any ray of hope. After decades of economic growth

in much of the world, the globe is alleged to have witnessed a dramatic splintering of income inequality both internationally and intra-nationally. Globally, the income of the world's richest 1 per cent of earners are equivalent to those of the poorest 57 per cent. The international inequality, which had remained rather stable with Gini coefficient at 0.46 between 1950 and 1985, has increased dramatically by 17 per cent to perk at 0.54 over the past decades. While the average income of the world was nine times the Sub-Saharan African average in the 1960s, disconcerting the disparity doubled during

delve into defining scope of works by a narrow statistical concept of agricultural sector production but should embrace the whole food and agricultural system.

Baneful bifurcations

At the moment, in the world at large, the number of people operating at a marginal level is reported to far outweigh the number at the dominant level. But the economic weight of the global agricultural systems depends more on the dominant minority. *Ipsa facto*, agricultural economics may be driven unduly by economic weight rather than by relevant population

to these technologies. The distribution of land still matters in a world where out of 460 million farmers, more than four-fifths farm smaller than two hectares of land and out of these small farms 90 per cent come from low income countries. Even places where land is not a major source of income, land reforms that provide at least homestead sites can be important for improving the security, status and bargaining power of the asset poor households.

But despite the empirical support to the contention of a positive land-income nexus, not much steps worthy of notes could be cited as

precondition for the others. Digital divide seems to be relatively pervasive in the poor developing countries. Whereas, empirical evidences suggest- for example in Bangladesh -- that the poor in rural areas tend to reap home better benefits from telephone that goes to lower transaction costs and enhances participation in land and labour market by at least 8 per cent.

Research for rich

No less important contribution to bifurcation, perhaps, comes from agricultural research investments. The benefits of agricultural research investment are large and

Deadly dilemma

The IAAE president thus also brought to the fore the bifurcation in other aspects of agricultural issues: uses of water, preservation of environment and natural resources and others. He seems to foresee a huge dilemma -- the failure of the global integration of agriculture and related benefits for income distribution not marching up to the mark. The dilemma develops just on the eve of the 21st century that got off to a Millennium Development Goal of cutting undernutrition by half by 2015. According to him, the dilemma is getting deeper with agriculture gradually drifting into an ever more drastic bifurcation at a global level and within many countries.

However, solution is not out of sight. Correcting that bifurcation would require large investment in rural areas and rural people, in institutions and information and in biological technologies with the provisions of access by the small holder households. An underestimation of the societal risks of inaction would perpetuate inequality. Rural poverty until recently was little risks for world security but with virtually all the poor knowing the potential life styles elsewhere in the globe, relative deprivation becomes hard to be ignored anymore. The message seems to be that "urban-bias" policies of the past should be replaced by the "rural-bias" policies at present to contain any further deterioration in the distribution of income.

Clarion call

At the end, the president of the IAAE called upon his colleagues to rise with the tide of the time through common spirit of professional ethics and ambitions to contribute to people's well being with regard to agriculture, food and rural areas. "Agricultural economics is part of the solution, but may also be part of the problem our profession would merely observe and not sufficiently direct itself to research-based problem solving. We have a fair degree of freedom to make choices regarding our priorities in agricultural economics research. Creative choices remain essential for a sharp profile of our profession. This is even more important today than in the coming decades, as the profile of the agricultural sector becomes more and more diffused within the larger economy, as it grows more complex and bifurcated as discussed.... To day more than ever before, our research agendas are potentially more relevant for society, development, security and peace... a renewed focus on the distributional effects of agricultural policy is part of such services to society".

Abdul Bayes is Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

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BENEATH THE SURFACE

the last decades. Growth thus appeared as a necessary but not sufficient condition to put poor people on an even keel.

Given these sordid statistics, the justification for a reexamination of the role of agriculture rests on the absence of appropriate policies, institutions and public investments and more importantly, on the heels of rapid global and regional changes in the characteristics of agriculture. The old agriculture has been giving way to the new.

New agriculture

The agriculture and food system is increasingly changing from a relatively large and distinct sector of the economy into a more pervasive, integrated system in which resource use and ecosystem functions are linked to consumers via extended food and service chains with multiple market and non-market institutions shaping the system. "Essentially, a development is underway from a linear relationship between farmers, markets, agro industry and consumers towards systems of interactions between and among these four, with policy making and institutional innovations cutting across the system in a more complex fashion. These developments proceed to a different extent and at different speeds in different parts of the world; and when technology and education investments are low, the transformation of agriculture proceeds slowly which is one reason for bifurcations."

Therefore, according to Joachim von Braun, we need not only to reexamine the role of agriculture but also at the same breath, reread economics of traditional and subsistence agriculture beyond the field level. In other words, agricultural economists should not

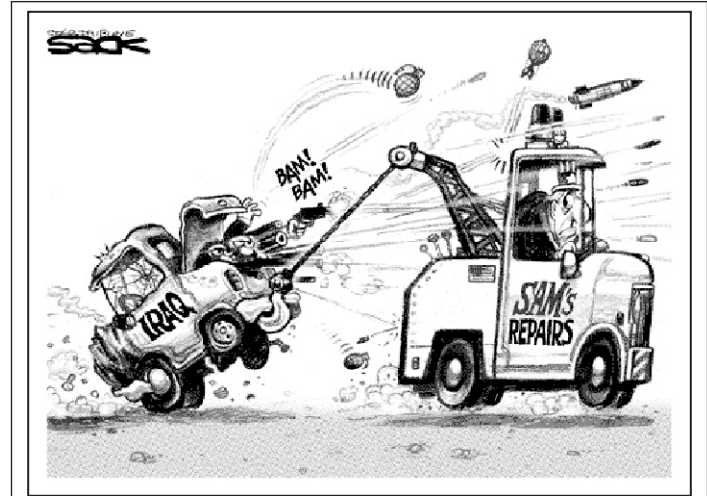
shares. "The bulk of our profession's research efforts focus on the structures and actors in the dominant group (talics mine) -- the small subset made up of large farms, sustainable agro ecologies, users of advanced science, integrated markets, competitive industries and rich consumers -- and much less on the large subset made up of small farms, nonsustainable agroecologies, users disconnected from science, fragmented markets, noncompetitive industries and poor consumers."

There is in evidence a hypothesis that access to land and natural resources is of decreasing importance for agricultural distribution effects due to growing technology and knowledge content of agricultural production process. However, the flipside of the hypothesis, suggests IAAE president, goes to reinforce the relevance of the access to such assets by the poor with little access

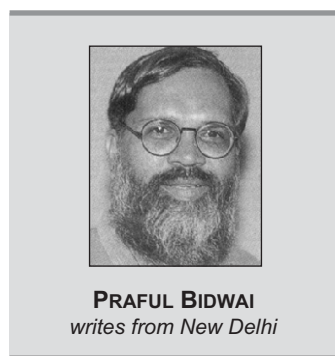
land reforms continue to remain a function of the distribution of political power. However, notes Joachim von Braun, the institutions accompanying land and other resources seem to matter more for distribution outcomes than the mere distribution of the resources themselves. It seems that like growth, land reform could also emerge as a necessary but not sufficient condition for uplift of the poor.

Technological take-off

The introduction of new technology *per se* might not serve the purpose of the poor in terms of distribution. With the breakthroughs in information and communications technology and bio technology in the 1990s, the gap has widened again. The "leapfrog" could not happen due to the digital divide. The president of the IAAE reminds us about the role of three 'c's in the case of ICTs' impact on the poor: connectivity, capability and content but admittedly connectivity matters the most for the poor given that it is a



India and justice for Palestine: Cancel the Sharon visit!



PRAFUL BIDWAI
writes from New Delhi

THE Vajpayee government has pushed a grossly partisan agenda by inviting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to visit India. The significance of Mr Sharon's presence in India on September 11 is obvious, "in-your-face": the pro-Hindutva government wants to underscore its solidarity with his "fight against terrorism".

This is morally and politically appalling. As we see below, Mr Sharon is himself guilty of terrorism -- against the Palestinian people. All sensible citizens must insist that the Sharon visit is cancelled.

To demand this is not to support anti-Semitism or to condone Hamas-style indiscriminate violence against Israeli citizens. Rather, it is to apply a consistent standard in dealing with the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Such a standard isn't visible in the Vajpayee government's awkward attempt to "balance" its tilt towards Israel by inviting Palestin-

ian foreign minister Nabil Sha'ath. This looks like terribly clumsy afterthought.

India's invitation to Mr Sharon is exceptional, even abnormal. Amidst Israel's war on the occupied territories, most nations wouldn't dignify Mr Sharon. He certainly won't be welcome in continental Europe.

There are three reasons for this. First, his Right-wing Likud party always takes an extremist stand against Palestinian nationhood. Second, he deserves to be tried as a

the occupation in the name of Biblical-era "Greater Israel".

Over 400,000 Israelis have illegally settled in the occupied territories. This settlement violates international law. Article 49 of the 4th Geneva Convention prohibits an occupying power from transferring any part of its civilian population into the occupied territory.

he occupation has been declared illegal by numerous Security Council resolutions. Israel has done nothing to vacate it thanks to the protection it receives from the US.

position. The Oslo process was an unmitigated disaster. Israel cheated even on its far-from-heavy commitments.

Mr Sharon has blood on his hands. As defence minister in 1982, he launched an unprovoked war on Lebanon (where the PLO had taken refuge), killing 17,000 civilians. In September 1982, he arranged for the Phalangist Christian militia to enter the Sabra and Chatilla refugee camps near Beirut, and butcher 2,000-3,000 people. The area was then fully under

has been extremely negative. He provoked the second *intifadah* through his walk in September 2000 on a holy site in East Jerusalem.

Following this, Israel ruthlessly escalated its repression and pursued targeted assassinations, by relying on tanks, helicopter gunships, laser-guided weapons, and F-16s.

Mr Sharon's headline policy led to the ceasefire's collapse on August 21.

As for the Road Map, Mr Sharon did his best to delay its publication,

between Israel and the West Bank. The 8-metre-high "Apartheid" or "Berlin" Wall will be 650 km-long, compared to the 3.6-metre-high, 155 km-long original.

Israel is moving towards semi-apartheid. Its parliament has passed a law that would force Palestinians marrying Israelis to live separate lives or leave Israel. Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza who marry Israeli Arabs will be barred from obtaining Israeli residence permits.

This cruelly mocks at "pluralism, tolerance and equal opportunity"--virtues which India's National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra sees as common between the US, India and Israel! Mr Mishra advocates their joint axis to combat terrorism.

This dangerous proposal is inspired by the *sangh parivar's* demonised perception of Islam. The *parivar* admires Israel's militarised society and anti-Arab policies in which it sees a reflection of its anti-Muslim prejudice.

The Vajpayee government is bringing ignominy upon itself by honouring Mr Sharon. It is renegeing on India's long-standing commitment to decolonisation, Palestinian nationhood and peace in West Asia-North Africa.

Such betrayal of India's own agenda certainly won't go down well with the public. The public must speak up.

Praful Bidwai is an eminent Indian columnist.

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war criminal for the Sabra and Chatilla massacres of 1982. And third, he represents the biggest obstacle even in the Washington-brokered Israel-friendly Road Map to peace.

Israel was created in 1948 to right a historic wrong -- the expulsion and persecution of the Jews. But this *wrongfully* deprived the Palestinians of 78 percent of the land under the earlier British Mandate.

In the 1967 War, Israel took over even the rest: the West Bank along the Jordan River, Gaza along the Mediterranean, and East Jerusalem. They have since been under military occupation. Likud justifies

The Palestinians have fought determinedly against the occupation. For years, they refused to recognise Israel as a moral-legal entity. But in 1988, in a huge compromise, the Palestinian National Council voted for a two-state solution, with Palestine having only the 22 percent land. The Palestinians want peace, dignity and the right for refugees to return.

Likud strongly opposes a two-state solution, although a majority of Israelis don't want to hold on to the occupied territories. The first uprising or *intifadah* (1988-93) led to the Oslo "peace" process. But the PLO came to the table in a weak

Israeli control. Israel ignored even the US ambassador's pleas: "You must stop the massacres. They are o b s c e n e ... They are killing children. You are in absolute control of the area and therefore responsible..."

A high-level inquiry held that Mr Sharon failed to take basic precautions to protect innocent civilians; "these blunders constitute the non-fulfilment of a duty." A 2001 BBC documentary "The Accused" contains details of Mr Sharon's disgraceful role. He must be tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Third, Mr Sharon's recent role

and has since tried to sabotage it by raising 14 objections. The Map is tilted in Israel's favour. But Mr Sharon is loath to grant statehood to Palestine by 2005 as the Map demands.

Israel routinely commits massive human rights violations. Its Shin Bet agency has admitted to detaining Palestinian prisoners for weeks at a secret centre in violation of international law. The blindfolded prisoners are kept in black, windowless cells. Of their whereabouts, they are told: "on the moon."

Mr Sharon's most despicable recent move is to build a high wall

OPINION

India's insidious river linking plan

MD MUJIBUR RAHMAN

IN a nationwide address (14th August) on the eve of India's 57th Independence Day, Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam has confirmed his country's gigantic water-linking plan, intended to divert enormous quantities of water from the major rivers including the Ganges and the Brahmaputra to its drought prone southern and eastern states. If the deadly plan is implemented, it will seriously affect the flows of the Surma, the Kushiara, the Brahmaputra and the Ganges rivers, in fact the whole of riverine Bangladesh. According to our scientists, even 10 to 25 per cent reduction in the water flow of the

ivers of our country will dry up vast areas, specially in the winter season. It is needless to point out that as a result of unilateral withdrawal of waters from the Ganges at Farakka, we are already suffering much, as the northern and western parts of our country are facing acute shortage of water which is causing stoppage of our Ganges-Kabadak project, affecting even the Sundarbans, not to speak of stunted fish production and industry and ecological problems. Therefore the implementation of India's proposed river linking plan will seriously aggravate our problems. But 'friendly' country India is unconcerned and is caring a fig for our interests!

Before making suggestions to counteract India's dangerous water-linking plan it is essential to discuss some of international laws and practices in this regard.

The Hornum Doctrine: The Hornum Doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty over international river, originated in the US in 1895, has in fact never been followed and practised by any state, not even by the US. Thus while resolving the Rio Grondo dispute the US did agree to provide Mexico with water equivalent to what Mexico had used before the diversion of waters from the Rio Grondo for irrigation purposes in the US took place. The 1933 Montevideo Declaration adopted by the Seventh International Conference

of American States limits the right of utilisation of common waters by the obligation not to infringe the legal right of utilisation of other states. Similar views are also expressed by the Inter-American Bar Association, the Institute of International Law and the International Law Association. The 1977 UN Water Conference at Mar del Plata has also accepted this view of basin states' responsibility in dealing with common waters.

Besides in a number of court cases the US Supreme Court [e.g. Kansas vs Colorado (1902), North Dakota vs Minnesota (1923), New Jersey vs New York (1931) etc], the Swiss Federal Court [e.g. Aargan vs. Zurich (1878), Schiff Nausen vs Zurich (1897), etc.] and the German

Court [Wathenberg and Prussia vs Baden (1927)] asserted that they invoked the principles of equitable apportionment and limited territorial sovereignty as established principles of international law. Similarly the Italian Court of Cessionat asserted that "International Law recognises the right on the part of every riparian state to enjoy as a participant of a kind of partnership created by the river."

Again, article 7 of 1933 Montevideo Declaration of American States provides that "The works which a state plans to perform in international waters shall be previously announced to the other riparian states". The 1957 Buenos Aires Resolution of Inter-American Bar

Association requires the consent of a co-basin state when that state may suffer damage of injury as a result of a proposed work.

In view of the decisions of the above stated court cases, and as per international laws and practices, we must ask India to stop immediately its proposed river-linking plan and strictly follow all international laws and practices in this regard. It should sit together with Bangladesh and endeavour to find out alternative plan, more reasonable, practicable and justifiable, such as construction of storage reservoirs on the Ganges Himalayan tributaries with the cooperation of a third party -- Nepal -- in order to augment the dry

season flow of the Ganges.

If India does not listen to it and goes ahead with the proposed plan then we should file a case in the International Court of Justice or an International Tribunal for stopping the operation of the proposed plan and also for claiming damages caused by its unilateral withdrawal of waters from the Ganges and other 54 common rivers, as was done by Spain for resolving the Lake Lanoux dispute, which was eventually settled by the Lake Lanoux Arbitral Tribunal. While rejecting France's claim for absolute territorial sovereignty over its river, it held; "Territorial sovereignty plays the part of presumption. It must bend before all interna-

tional obligations to take into consideration the different interests at stake, to strive to give them all satisfaction compatible with the pursuit of its own interests and to demonstrate that on this subject it has a real solicitude to reconcile the interests of the other riparian with its own."

The Indus and all its tributaries are flowing into Pakistan from Indian side. But India never withdraws water unilaterally, and strictly follows the terms and conditions of Indus Basin Water Treaty Agreement of 1960. Then why not in case of Bangladesh?

The author is a retired Collector of Customs.